

Mauricetown Freight Station-
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Cumberland & Maurice Railroad
South Delsea Drive (State Route 47)
Dorchester Vicinity
Cumberland County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1159

HABS
NJ
6-DORCH
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS
NJ
6-DORCH.V,
2-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MAURICETOWN FREIGHT STATION

HABS No. NJ-1159

Location: South Delsea Drive (State Route 47), Dorchester Vicinity, Cumberland County, New Jersey

Significance: This vernacular Victorian depot is one of few remaining rail-related buildings in South Jersey, where railroads and related buildings once abounded.

Description: The small, one-story rectangular depot is dominated by the deep eaves of the gable roof, supported by plain brackets. The side-facing original block is two bays deep and six bays long set on a new concrete-block foundation. The two center bays of the side facade are contained in a projecting bay, from which railroad employees could watch for oncoming trains. The only significant ornamentation is the decorative Victorian "framing" patterns worked into the horizontal clapboard siding and vertical members with scalloped ends in the gable-end pediment. A modern frame addition has been made to the rear facade, composed of a two-bay-deep shed with continuous roof off the original block. The nine-panel wood door is extant, but the window openings are boarded up.

History: Establishing the railroads in South Jersey took a long time but showed a gradual profit. The first, Camden and Woodbury Railroad, was chartered in 1836, but it failed due to lack of ridership. This, however, did not discourage proponents of a line connecting South Jersey with Philadelphia--including Salem and Bridgeton residents. In 1853 the West Jersey Railroad was authorized to build a line from Camden through the counties Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, and Cape May. The railroad began operation in 1857 and by the end of the nineteenth century it offered services to Philadelphia via Salem, Swedesboro, Woodbury, Wenonah, Glassboro, Clayton, Vineland, Millville, and Cape May. The same year the West Jersey Railroad began operating, the Millville and Glassboro Railroad was incorporated with a twenty-two mile route from Millville to Glassboro. At Glassboro, passengers took a stagecoach to Woodbury. In 1875 the West Jersey Railroad connected with the Millville-Glassboro Railroad in Glassboro, and passengers could complete their trips to Camden and Philadelphia without interruption.

The Cape May and Millville Railroad Company was incorporated in 1863 to compete with the Millville and Glassboro Railroad. The Cape May and Millville line acquired permission from the state to build along the right-of-way that the Millville and Glassboro line had reserved in a previous charter. The state, however, favored the Cape May and Millville company because it had agreed with the West Jersey Railroad to serve as one rail system that connected directly with the Salem Railroad Company. This single network could then be "operated with greater economy under one management." West Jersey could lease and operate the Cape May and Millville Railroad and the Salem Railroad; this passed through Manumuskin, Belleplain, Woodhine, Mt. Pleasant, Seaville, Swainton, Cape May Court House, Rio Grande, and Bennett. The railroad tracks in Millville ran northwest to southeast through the town with a depot at High and Broad streets. Another minor depot was located at the "rear of the yard of Warren Hall on the north side of Broad Street between Buck and High [streets]."¹

In 1861, the Pennsylvania Railroad laid its first lines into Bridgeton with a terminal on Irving Avenue near Walnut Street, later extended around East Lake and downtown to what is now the visitors' center. In 1875 the West Jersey also extended a line to Bridgeton via Glassboro and Elmer; at Elmer a

¹ Millville, New Jersey, Centennial Souvenir, 1866-1966, (Millville: Millville Centennial Corp., 1966), n.p.

MAURICETOWN FREIGHT STATION
HABS No. NJ-1159 (Page 2)

connection could be made with the Salem Railroad. The line that connected with Bridgeton eventually ran a spur to Port Norris; this was called the Bridgeton and Port Norris Railroad and was incorporated in 1866. Completed in 1875, it transported oysters from Port Norris to Bridgeton and on to major market cities. Shortly after completion the railroad was sold to the Cumberland and Maurice Railroad Company in foreclosure proceedings. The line served Bridgeton, Buckville, Fairton, Westcott's, North Cedarville, Cedarville, Newport, Dividing Creek, Buckshutem, Mauricetown, Centreville and Port Norris. Stage connections could be made at Newport, Dividing Creek, and Mauricetown, while the train connection to Philadelphia could be made at the West Jersey depot in Bridgeton.

The New Jersey Southern Railroad, a unit of the New Jersey Central Railroad, was incorporated in 1867 and ready for service from Vineland in 1872. The line passed through the central part of Cumberland County extending from Bayside/Caviar on the Delaware River to Bridgeton and Vineland, then northward to New York City. In the 1880s the railroad passed under the control of the Reading Railroad company. Salem Railroad, chartered in 1856, originally ran sixteen miles from Salem to Elmer. It was completed in 1870, including a spur to Bridgeton. The Salem depot for the West Jersey and Seashore Railroad, and freight-train station and office, were located on Grant Street. Today the latter is used as the office for the West Jersey Line Excursion Tours, which offers recreational train rides through Salem County.

By the 1930s, the railroad's importance in South Jersey was diminishing. Businesses, vacationers, and residents relied more and more upon vehicular transportation. In addition, many of the industries that had once supported the railroad were no longer profitable; the caviar industry had ceased and the oyster industry was slipping into a forty-year slump that continues today. In 1933, the Maurice River Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad had reached such a low ebb that the New Jersey State Public Utilities Commission approved a plan to eliminate the service. In the mid twentieth century, Conrail took over several of the financially failing lines that passed through South Jersey. One, the Millville-Leesburg and Manumuskin line, was rehabilitated in 1982 to ship sand for the local sandmining companies. The same year, however, Conrail dropped its service to Seabrook--just north of Bridgeton--due to dwindling profits. Four years later Conrail also dropped its southern railroads, which included the Millville-Leesburg and Manumuskin and the Bridgeton-Mauricetown lines. The Winchester and Western Railroad bought forty-six miles and operated eighteen miles of Conrail's lines. "Along with the Bridgeton to Millville run, Winchester and Western also operates two other freight trains around the county, forming a horseshoe route around townships that include Dorchester, Downe, Commercial, Lawrence, Fairfield and Upper Deerfield."²

The Cumherland & Maurice Railroad Company, Mauricetown Freight Station depot was moved from its original site to the south side of Route 47 near Dorchester, where the owner has made some additions to the rear facade.

Sources:

Bridgeton Chronicle, 1874-1900.

Chew, Sinnickson. "Salem-Pennsville-New Castle Line was Earliest Local Rail Dream." Today's Sunbeam, 12 April 1984.

² Diana Mitsu Klos, "Cumberland Short Line Keeps An American Tradition Alive," Daily Journal (5 July 1988), A6.

MAURICETOWN FREIGHT STATION
HABS No. NJ-1159 (Page 3)

Cushing, Thomas, and Charles W. Sheppard. History of Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland Counties. Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1883.

Jones, Jean. "Conrail to Rehabilitate Rail Lines for \$500,000." Millville Daily News, 10 September 1982.

Klos, Diana Mitsu. "Cumberland Short Line Keeps An American Tradition Alive." Daily Journal, 5 July 1988.

Lane, Wheaton J. From Indian Trail to Iron Horse: Travel and Transportation in New Jersey, 1620-1860. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939.

Millville, New Jersey, Centennial Souvenir, 1866-1966. Millville: Millville Centennial Corp., 1966.

Neumann, Mark. "Conrail Drops Its Seabrook Line." Bridgeton Evening News, 17 June 1982.

Sehold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

Sharp, Francis H. "Winchester and Western Railroad Stays on Track," Bridgeton Evening News, 1 November 1988.

Map of the Railroad of New Jersey (Philadelphia: J.L. Smith, 1871)

Vanneman, William. "Busy Days in the Old Railroad Office." Today's Sunbeam, [n.d.], n.p.

Project Information: The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was Kimberly R. Sehold (University of Delaware). The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.